



## Star Fort Pond Activities

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## **Star Fort Pond Bird Watching**

Walk quietly through our meadows and woods. Ignore the sounds of people and cars. Walk quietly along the edge of Star Fort Pond—a path called the Fishermen’s Trail. Go up to the edge of the pond, but be careful to stay out of the water. Listen for the sounds of animals. Look closely for birds and their nests. Like all animals, birds need a certain amount of food, water, space, and shelter. A list or inventory of different kinds of birds observed in an area shows the quality of that environment. An area with a higher number of different birds and different species of birds indicates a healthier environment than an area with fewer birds. Count and record the number of birds you see and hear, plus the number of nests you observe along your nature walk. You may walk along the entire fisherman’s access trail, which is about one mile long. This trail encircles the entire 27 acre pond. You may decide to walk a shorter distance. A walk from the boat launch across the dam to the picnic area and back is another option. Even just a shorter walk along one shore of the pond will enable you to see and hear birds. Whichever route you choose, you will observe many birds along your walk. Be sure to record your observations on your table. Discuss your data with other members of your group.

### **Bird Observations**

<b>Birds Heard</b>		<b>Birds Seen</b>		<b>Nests Seen</b>	
<b>Tally Marks</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Tally Marks</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Tally Marks</b>	<b>Number</b>

Compare your table with other members of your class. Talk about your results. Were you surprised at the number of birds you were able to see or hear? Do you think Star Fort Pond is a good environment for birds? Why or why not? Continue bird watching at your school and home. See if you notice birds more often after today’s bird watching experience.

## **Star Fort Nature Walk**

Ninety Six National Historic Site has many great locations to choose from to take children and adults on nature walks. Walks are available that start either at the visitor's center or at the pond. The Star Fort Pond is located on the northeast corner of Ninety Six National Historic Site. The parking lot for the pond is located off Kinard Road in Ninety Six, SC.

One nature walk option is to walk along the entire Fisherman's Access Trail. This trail encircles the entire 27 acre pond. Another option is to walk along the eastern side of the pond closest to the parking lot. Walkers may also choose to walk across the dam to the picnic area or further along the western side of the pond. Choose the length of your walk according to the age of the participants. All walks can be shortened for younger children or lengthened for older visitors.

Once you begin your walk, help students observe the details of the natural objects they find along the way. Instead of just pointing out a tree as a single object, help participants observe objects more carefully. Upon closer inspection, they may notice a spider web, a bird building a nest, a cluster of unusual leaves or bark, or even a wasp's nest. Children can be on the lookout for unusual stones or rocks, ant colonies, other animal homes, or footprints. Also, help walkers listen to the sounds that nature makes. Participants can listen for squirrels, chipmunks, insects, birds, or running water. Remind all participants that it is forbidden to remove any natural objects or artifacts from the park, "take nothing but pictures, leave nothing but footprints" is the rule for all visitors.

Sample questions to ask during the nature walk:

- What does the sky look like today?
- What animals do you see?
- Any there any insects or birds?
- What do the trees look like?
- What colors do you see?
- Is there any traffic nearby?
- Do you hear any birds or buzzing insects?
- Do you see any flowers or vegetable plants?
- Is there any wind today? Can you feel a breeze? Can you hear any wind?
- Pinch some soil between your fingers. Is it sandy? Or does it stick together, like clay?

The time of season of your nature walk can provide additional features for children to observe. Look for wildflowers that are abundant during the spring. Look at their colors, talk about how they are pollinated and why. Knowing names of the flowers is not important, but older children might be interested in knowing the names of plants found in an appropriate guidebook. During the summer, watch and listen for birds and animals. Point out and compare mature plants. Leaves and acorns should be on the ground during the fall season. During a winter walk, you can talk about the changes to the trees and where animals go when it is cold.

Younger children might like to play either of these games during a walk that can be shorter than one for older children.

### **I Spy**

This guessing game starts with player one saying, "I spy with my little eye. . ." and then giving a brief description of something they see (usually one way by which to describe it such as a color or size). As the other players guess incorrectly, Player One may add more details one at a time, until someone makes a correct guess. The correct guesser then chooses the next student who picks an item for all to try guessing.

### **Name It**

Ask the children to name objects they observe, or quiz them about what they encounter on the walk. The questions can be as simple as "Do you see something brown?" to something more complex such as "How many different plant types do you see?" or "Do you see a bird with a blue wing and one with a black wing?"

Older children might like to complete a checklist as they walk through the park. Remind all participants that can look but not take any natural items out of the park with them.

## **Nature Walk Checklist**

Check off any of these items you see along your nature walk. Remember not to take any of these out of the park with you after your walk.

ACORN	_____
PINECONE	_____
BUTTERFLY	_____
PARK SIGN	_____
GREEN LEAF	_____
SQUIRREL	_____
RED LEAF	_____
BIRD	_____
WATER	_____
INSECT	_____

Describe your favorite nature walk find.

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Draw your favorite nature walk find.

## **Walk the Cherokee Path**

Travel back in time and walk through these woodlands as Native American people did thousands of years ago. Cherokee, Wateree, and Creek hunted, traded, and traveled on this very path. It once stretched from the lower Cherokee town of Keowee, near Clemson, to the Congaree River, near Columbia. The path also forked north from the Congaree River to the Catawba Nation, near Rock Hill, and south to Charles Towne, present day Charleston. Early trappers, traders, and settlers followed this trail to the colonial frontier many hundreds of years ago. Merchandise, skins, and furs were exchanged between the Backcountry and the Carolina coast. Patriots and Loyalists fought alongside this path during the American Revolution. Two towns, Ninety Six and Cambridge, both bordered this trail, flourished and then died out. The forest has now retaken this small, peaceful corner of South Carolina.

Over time, the path faded as a landmark except in a few places. Through archeological research, the Cherokee Path's sunken remains have been recovered and serve as a reminder of the past. A small portion of the path has been restored at Ninety Six National Historic Site.

An entrance to the Cherokee Path Trail is located at Star Fort Pond. The path starts on the western border of the pond, near the picnic table. The path is 1.5 miles long from the pond to the paved historic path. Return along the Cherokee Path or follow the historic paved path to the Visitor's Center at Ninety Six National Historic Site.

The path intersects with three other trails in the park. One trail the path crosses over is the Gouedy Trail. Follow this trail for another 1.5 mile loop and travel past the location of Robert Gouedy's home and trading post, the first major trader between the Cherokee and the settlers in this area of the backcountry.

The path also crosses over the Charleston Road, the main route from the coast to the Backcountry during colonial times. Take a side trip along the Charleston Road. Follow it north and walk through the outline of the original town of Ninety Six and the earthen Star Fort defended by the British in 1781. See the remains of the trenches, the mine, and the tower used by the Patriots to attack the British, who successfully defended the fort.

The path also intersects the 1 mile paved historic trail that winds through the park. Follow this path past a reconstructed stockade fort from the first southern land battle of the American Revolution, the sites of Ninety Six and Cambridge, a log cabin, the Star Fort, the trenches, the reconstructed rifle tower, the observation tower, and the visitor's center. In the visitor's center there is a museum room, a movie detailing the 1781 siege and battle of Star Fort, and a gift shop. Restrooms and a picnic area are also available near the visitor's center.

# **Investigation of the Star Fort Pond Riparian**

## **Initial Discussion Questions**

What is a riparian? Have you ever been to one? Where would you find one? How far would you have to travel to get to one? What would one look, smell, or sound like? Where do you think one is here at Star Fort Pond?

## **Background**

The green, grassy border around a pond or other body of water is a riparian. It is a transition area between water and land. These variable edge areas can be narrow or wide depending on the level of water and the plants and animals in an environment. Plants with roots that need a lot of water grow well in a riparian. Roots of grasses, shrubs, and trees help prevent erosion of the bank by strengthening the edge of the pond. Less dirt and other debris enter the water because they are trapped and filtered by the roots of plants growing on the bank. This helps improve the quality of the water in the pond.

All animals need food, water, shelter, and space to live and grow. The roots of water loving plants all along the bank of the pond provide diverse plant and animal habitats. Both large and small animals find shelter in such an ecologically diverse environment. Bits of plants, small animals, and insects falling into the water provide food as part of many water animals' food chains.

Star Fort Pond is home to many birds, animals, and insects. Reptiles you may see are the Eastern Box Turtles or Common Snapping Turtles. Frogs in the pond include Bullfrogs, Green Frogs, Peepers, and also tadpoles in the spring. Lizards to look for include the Green Anole, Ground Skink, and Eastern Glass Lizard. Snakes living in this habitat that you may see are the Banded-Water Snake, Yellow-Bellied Water Snake, Black Rat Snake, and the American Copperhead. The Spotted Salamander and the Mud Salamander are common to in this area. Birds are abundant here at Star Fort Pond. Look for Carolina Wrens, woodpeckers, hawks, and Song Sparrows. Chipmunks and squirrels thrive throughout the park. If you walk far enough down the fisherman's trail you will see evidence of beavers and the dam they have built. Star Fort Pond is a diverse environment, take time to observe the varied plants and animals that thrive here in this riparian.

## **Observations**

Walk along the trail on both sides of Star Fort Pond. Stay with your partner. Be patient. Stop, look, and listen. Amazing sights and sounds of nature are all around you in this riparian habitat. Observe carefully the many animals and birds you see and hear. Walk quietly to the edge of the pond. Do not walk into the water, instead stand on the edge of the bank. Look for any animals or plants you can see in the water or on the bank. Remember not to pick up or disturb any plants or animals. You cannot take anything home with you. Record all of your observations. Draw some of the plants and animals you have seen. Discuss with your group what you have seen and heard along your walk through this border area between water and land.

# Investigation of Star Fort Pond Riparian

Name\_\_\_\_\_

Record your observations

Birds	Mammals	Insects	Reptiles	Amphibians	Tracks	Fish
Tally Marks	Tally Marks	Tally Marks	Tally Marks	Tally Marks	Tally Marks	Tally Marks
Number	Number	Number	Number	Number	Number	Number

Draw and label a plant you observed.

Draw and label an animal you observed.

Describe your most interesting observation.



## **Ninety Six Wildlife Count**

Estimate and then make an actual count of the number of birds and animals you observe in one wildlife spot. Remember birds, spiders, insects, amphibians, mammals, and reptiles all count as wildlife. Find a spot away from all other students. Sit down. Estimate how many different animals you will see and hear in 5 minutes. Share your estimate with your class. Now, sit as quietly as possible. Do not get up and change spots. Ignore all other students. Use your senses to observe wildlife. Use your eyes to look and your ears to listen. Keep count of all the animals you see and hear in 5 minutes. Share your results with your class. Discuss what animals you saw and heard. What types of animals did you see? How many different colors did you see? What sounds did you hear? Did you hear birds? Did you hear any other animals? Were you surprised by how many different animals you observed? Was your estimate accurate? Do you think Ninety Six National Historic Site is a good environment for animals? Why or why not?

## **Bio-Ring Investigation**

Today you will observe the plants and animals living in the wetlands next to the Star Fort Pond. These biologically diverse plants and animals living here may be the same or different from the plants and animals living near your home. Try to observe as many different types of animals and plants you can. Remember to conserve the natural resources of this ecosystem. Do not take any plants or animals home with you. Protect and be respectful of all living things.

Work with your partner. First, take either a large pipe cleaner or a wire hanger and bend it into a large circle. Find a spot along the edge of the pond, away from other students, and throw it on the ground. Be careful to stay on the bank and not in the water. Do not move your Bio-Ring once it has been thrown. Take a few minutes to just observe the land inside your Bio-Ring. You may turn over any rocks or sticks inside your ring to observe the animals living under them. Be sure to take your Bio-Ring with you when your activity is complete.

**Record your observations. Draw what you see just inside your Bio-Ring. Answer the four questions.**

**How many different kinds of animals did you find in your Bio-Ring? \_\_\_\_\_**

**How many different kinds of plants did you find in your Bio-Ring? \_\_\_\_\_**

**What was the biggest animal in your Bio-Ring? \_\_\_\_\_**

**What was the smallest animal in your Bio-Ring? \_\_\_\_\_**

Share with your class your observations of the diversity of life you found inside your Bio-Ring. What observations surprised you? What plants and animals did you find? Are these living things like the ones near your home? Are they different? Try this activity at home and compare your results to today's results.